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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISTANBUL 001703

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/15/2013

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SUBJECT: ISTANBUL SYNAGOGUES BOMBED

Classified By: Consul General David Arnett for Reasons 1.5 (b & d)

11. (u) Bombs detonated simultaneously at two of the major Jewish synagogues in Istanbul at approximately 9:30 am have claimed dozens of lives and injured over a hundred people. Based on observations by the Consul General, RSO, and poloffs at both sites, it appears that both buildings were targeted by vehicle bombs. Damage was extensive, cars on the streets were destroyed, storefronts ruined, and glass windows shattered blocks away. Consulate employees felt the shock from one of the explosions at their residence about a kilometer and a half away. Early reports indicate that at least 23 people have been killed and over a hundred wounded, although it is likely that the numbers will continue to rise.

12. (u) One of the sites was the Sisli Beth Israel synagogue, one of the community's most active. The Chief Rabbi, the President of the Jewish Community, and 60 other dignitaries were at the site when the explosion occurred for a ceremony to commemorate the completion of a restoration project. Members of the Jewish Community Board who were also at the site reported to us that the Chief Rabbi and the President of the Community escaped unharmed, but at least a dozen people were killed, including by-standers and security personnel.

13. (u) The other site was Neve Shalom synagogue, another of the community's main synagogues and the site of a 1986 machine-gun and grenade attack by Abu Nidal that claimed 20 lives. Although not heavily-used for normal Sabbath services, it is the primary site for special occasions, and today's explosion took place during a bar mitzvah ceremony attended by 400 people. Police on the scene told the CG that the bomb was carried by a small truck and that at least 10 people were killed. CG observed a large crater in front of the main entrance. Fortunately, extensive security measures at the site appear to have limited the damage to the front section of the building, away from the main hall. People attending the religious services were able to exit the building through a rear entrance.

14. (c) It is too soon to say who might have conducted the attacks. We have heard one report that IBDA-C (Islamic Great Eastern Raiders), a small and relatively inactive terrorist group, phoned the Anatolian news agency to claim responsibility. Our assessment of this group's capabilities, however, suggests that they would be unable to conduct such an attack. The Minister of Interior also told the Ambassador that these attacks do not fit the pattern of the PKK, DHKP-C, MLKP, or any of the local groups whose activities they track closely.

15. (u) We have no reports so far that any American citizens were killed or injured at either site. We are in touch with local hospitals to ensure that we are notified promptly if any Americans are brought in. We did speak with one uninjured Amciti, Rabbi Mendy Chitrik, who was at the Ashkenzai synagogue, not far from Neve Shalom, at the time of the explosion.

15. (c) Action Request: The Ambassador has expressed the condolences of the USG and offers of assistance to the Minister of Interior, the Foreign Ministry, and the Israeli Embassy; the CG has conveyed them to the Israeli CG and leadership of the Jewish community. Because there are indications that this might be the work of international terrorist groups, post requests that we be authorized to offer FBI assistance to the Turkish authorities to assist them in their investigations.

ARNETT